

**Meeting Minutes
Virginia Board of Education
Committee on the Lowest Performing School Systems**

Tuesday, November 16, 2004

Mr. Mark Emblidge, chairman of the committee, opened the meeting. Committee members present were Mr. Thomas Jackson, Mrs. Isis Castro, Mr. Scott Goodman, Mr. David Johnson, Dr. Gary Jones, and Mrs. Eleanor Saslaw.

Dr. James Heywood briefed the committee on the academic review process. He reviewed the steps that the Board had taken regarding the protocol for undertaking academic reviews. Dr. Heywood discussed the criteria for reviews, which are: 1) school divisions not meeting required federal benchmarks for student achievement (adequate yearly progress); 2) divisions with a percentage of students attending schools in the “accredited with warning” status that exceeds the statewide average; and 3) school divisions where a failure to reach full accreditation is related to a school boards’ noncompliance with the Standards of Quality.

Dr. Heywood indicated that four school divisions have voluntarily participated in the academic review process. They are: 1) Lee County; 2) Petersburg City; 3) Richmond City; and 4) Sussex County. (Dr. Heywood also indicated that these school divisions most likely would have met the criteria for a review.) The reviews for Lee County, Petersburg City, and Sussex County are currently underway. The City of Richmond is considering using a report prepared by the Council of Great City Schools as a foundation for its academic review.

Site visits have taken place at Lee County, Petersburg City, and Sussex County. At this time, the department and the respective school divisions have developed essential actions as part of an improvement plan. Dr. Heywood anticipates that Memoranda of Agreement will be signed with all four school divisions by December 9.

Dr. Heywood highlighted some of the problem areas that have been identified during the review process. Curriculum alignment, assessments, and professional development are considered areas for improvement. The Partnership for Achieving Successful Schools (PASS) pacing guide is being used as a tool for aligning curriculum within the divisions. Dr. Heywood also pointed out that the divisions have adopted the department’s curriculum framework. He also pointed out that, in the case of Lee County, regional department staff are making weekly visits to the division to ensure that department technical assistance is provided.

Mr. Emblidge asked how a school division could be removed from the academic review list. Dr. Heywood responded that it will take a few years but that an early indicator of success is the PASSMARK test score.

Dr. DeMary and Mr. Emblidge addressed some of the issues that the committee will examine next year. Dr. DeMary raised the issue of charter schools and their role in this process. Presentations by management companies/outside organizations (such as the Council of Great City Schools) would provide useful information to the Board. Mr. Emblidge mentioned that it

might be useful to maintain a list of management companies in the same spirit as what is currently being done for supplemental services. Dr. DeMary and Mr. Emblidge also indicated that it would be helpful to plan a presentation on turnaround specialists to coincide with the next cadre of specialists who will receive training. Dr. DeMary highlighted the fact that the next recruitment for turnaround specialists will include candidates who are out-of-state.

Dr. DeMary suggested that a good vehicle for a division to report quarterly progress to the Board would be through the low-performing schools committee rather than through the full Board meeting. A more informal setting may lend itself for a more productive discussion. It would be the responsibility of Mr. Emblidge to provide division findings from this meeting to the full Board.

Mr. Emblidge indicated that agendas will be formulated for meetings in the February to April 2005 time frame.